

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Effigy Mounds National Monument  
Harpers Ferry, Iowa



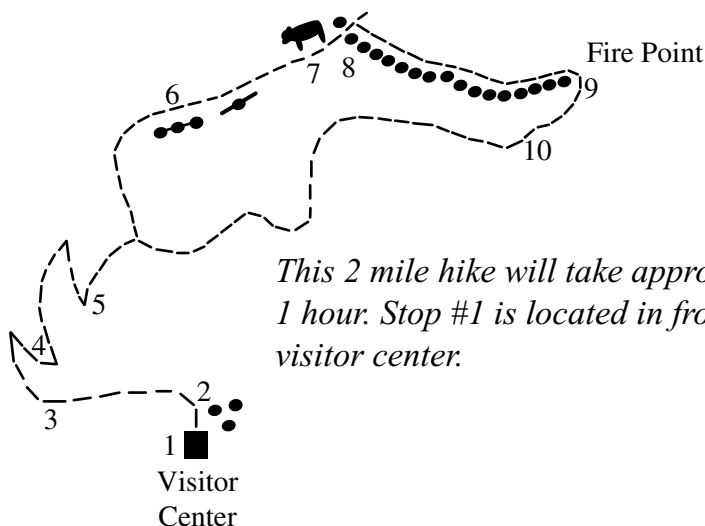
# FIRE POINT TRAIL GUIDE



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Park Ranger

*There are ten stops marked with numbered ground stakes.*

*USING THIS TRAIL GUIDE...*



*This 2 mile hike will take approximately 1 hour. Stop #1 is located in front of the visitor center.*

*For your safety and for the protection of the park resources, please stay on the trails. Walking on mounds or removing any natural objects from the park is prohibited.*



Help us protect Effigy Mounds National Monument. Report fires, vandalism, crime and safety hazards to park employees.

## Stop # 1

Effigy Mounds National Monument is a unit of the National Park System established in 1949 to preserve earthen mounds built by Native Americans in prehistoric times. At one time there were thousands of mounds throughout the Mississippi River Valley. However, as settlers moved into the region to farm, establish towns, and build transportation routes, the mounds were slowly destroyed until less than 2000 remained. We are fortunate to have preserved within the Monument over 200 of these ancient burial and ceremonial mounds.

Before starting the tour you must first understand two words that will be used many times during the walk... “prehistoric” and “culture.”

The word “**prehistoric**” refers to a time before the invention of writing in which history could be recorded. Anything prior to 1600 AD is generally considered prehistoric in this area. Prehistoric in North America is not the same as prehistoric in Europe or Asia where written records have been kept for centuries.

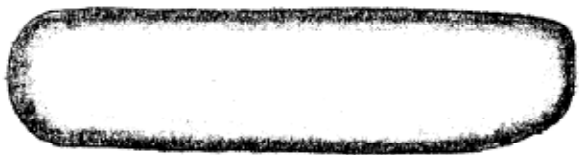
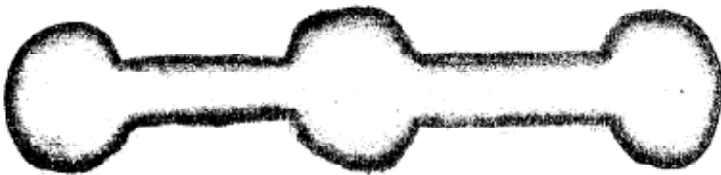
A **culture** is defined as a specific group of people with traits and beliefs that are unique to their group.

The prehistoric people that built the mounds lived here during the **Woodland Period** which lasted from 1000 BC until 1200 AD. Much about these people remains a mystery. Some of the items they left behind are used by archeologists to give us some insight about their lives; however, as this tour will show, it is an incomplete picture that may never be finished.

## Stop # 2

Here are 3 examples of mounds built during the Woodland Period. By examining pottery styles, archeologists have classified this period into 3 subcategories called Early, Middle, and Late Woodland. Mounds were built by various cultures throughout the entire Woodland Period; however, mound styles and burial practices would change and evolve throughout the time period.

During the Early Woodland Period, from 1000 BC until 300 BC, small **conical** (round) burial mounds were constructed. During the Middle Woodland Period, between 300 BC and 400 AD, more elaborate mounds were built. Larger conical, **linear** (elongated), and **compound** (a combination of conical and linear) mounds were not only built for burials, but also for ceremonial purposes. Finally, during the Late Woodland Period from 400 AD until 1200 AD, in addition to all the previous types of mounds, the **effigy** (animal shaped) mounds were constructed.



Archeologists have discovered there were four different types of burials used within some mounds. **Extended** burials were similar to today's burials with the dead laying on their back. A second style of burial is called **flexed**. This burial was with the body on its side in a fetal position. The third type of burial was **cremation** (charred bone remnants), which is also used today. Evidence of cremated remains was found in the mound farthest to your left. Finally, the fourth burial style is the **bundle** burial. This type of burial was used when human remains were left outdoors until most of the flesh was gone. The bones were then taken apart, bundled together, and buried in a mound with other burials. The mound closest to you had evidence of 12 in bundle burial style.

These three conical mounds were constructed as burial mounds during the Middle Woodland Period. The builders were influenced by the Hopewell Culture which was primarily in the Ohio River Valley. Typical Hopewellian burial practices included constructing larger conical mounds and placing exotic trade items and grave goods with the dead. Exotic artifacts from these mounds included a copper breast-plate, an obsidian spear point, and a bear tooth ornament. Other common grave items often included within Middle Woodland Hopewell mounds are spear points, nugget copper, clam shells, and mica.



### Stop # 3

Before going farther, it is important to understand how these prehistoric people would have used the natural world to their advantage. Animals were not only hunted for food but the skins were used for clothing and the bones were used for tools. Plants were eaten and used for medicine. Stones were used for tools and weapons. Everything the moundbuilders needed was found in the natural environment.



Think about these trees. How many ways could a tree be used by prehistoric people?

Wood for fire, branches for shelter, nuts for food, leaves for medicines, and bark for clothing. That's right... bark for clothing. Specifically, fibers within the inner bark of basswood trees could be softened and woven into fabric. By chance a small fragment of basswood cloth was found in one of the burial mounds at the bottom of this hill. One of the grave items found in the mounds by archeologists was a copper breastplate, an ornament 3 by 6 inches in size made from flattened copper. The salts and acids from the copper reacted with the basswood fabric underneath it, thus preserving a small fragment of the fabric. Since cloth decomposes relatively quickly when left in the ground, this piece of basswood cloth was a very special artifact.

## **Stop # 4**

Notice in this limestone rock there is a vein of **chert** — a gray to white line of rock about 6 to 8 inches long and 3/4 to 1 inch thick. Chert is a type of flint and was the primary stone used by prehistoric people in making spear points and everyday tools.

Feel the vein of chert. It has a smooth, almost oily texture. It is from this material they made spear points, blades, and scrapers. Bows and arrows had not yet been invented, so hunting was accomplished with spears which needed larger points than an arrow. Chert is found in this area in very large quantities and pieces. Think about how large a piece it would take to make one spear point about 8 inches long.

## **Stop # 5**

As you sit and rest at this stop, look around and think about living in this area 1000 years ago. While the Woodland people had to work hard, they lived in balance with the world around them.

Woodland people lived in small family groups or clans of 25 to 30 people. During the summer months several of these clans would come together and live along the banks of the rivers. They built small shelters made of tree branches and covered with bark. As summer changed to winter the clans dispersed and moved into rockshelters or caves found in the limestone bluffs of this area. Rockshelters were an excellent place to live in the winter.

They generally have a temperature of about 50° F. If you build a fire in one, on a cold January night you would be warm and protected from the elements.

Since these people traveled in a seasonal cycle according to where food resources were available at specific times of the year, they were **semi-nomadic**.

The Woodland people were not only influenced by the environment and other cultural groups in the immediate area, but also by prehistoric people all over North America. Artifacts found in some mounds built during the Middle Woodland time period show evidence of vast trade networks. Copper from the upper peninsula of Michigan, mica from the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, seashells from the Gulf of Mexico, and obsidian (volcanic glass) from the Yellowstone region of Wyoming were all exotic trade goods received through these trading networks.

What do you think the local prehistoric Indians used to trade for these items?

Beaver pelts and other furs may have been used, but archeologists have also found Mississippi River freshwater pearls in the graves of prehistoric people all over North America. These pearls were probably the most valuable item used for trade by the local Indians.

## **Stop # 6**

This is a compound mound. Note how it was constructed. There are 3 conical mounds connected together by linear mounds. The linear portions do not contain any burials or other artifacts, however the conical portions are probably



burial mounds. The three conical portions of the compound may have been constructed at different times and then linked together. Why do you think they would have done this?

One theory is to connect family members, like a family tree, but nobody really knows the answer. However, we do know these mounds represent more than simply a prehistoric cemetery... they are monuments to a past people.

What are some examples of monuments in our society? (e.g. Statue of Liberty, Mt. Rushmore, St. Louis Arch, St. Paul's Cathedral)

Why were they built? (e.g. record important events, religious observances, honored people, symbols of freedom)

Perhaps the Woodland Indians built their monuments for the same reasons we build monuments today.

When modern people build monuments, we hope they will survive forever. However, future cultures may not understand our monuments and could destroy them in the same way we destroyed the monuments built by the Woodland people.

Notice the conical mound at the north end is smaller than the other conical mounds. This portion of the mound was damaged by a farmer plowing his field before the National Park Service was here to protect the mounds. Early farmers, loggers, roadbuilders and settlers did not understand or recognize these ancient cultures and thus destroyed many mounds. Indian mounds, once very common in this area, are now quite rare. If they are to be preserved it is up to all of us, not just the National Park Service, to protect the monuments of the prehistoric people.

## **Stop # 7**

This is the Little Bear effigy mound. The word “effigy” is from the Greek word Epygious (F-fee-gee-ous) meaning “in the shape of” or “representation of.”

Study it for a few moments. Can you see its head and legs?

Does it really look like a bear or some other animal?

Why build a mound in the shape of an animal?

What direction is it facing?

How much dirt would you have to pile up to make a mound this size?

What kind of tools would be needed to build such a mound?

Turn around and look away from the mound. Can you see the river?

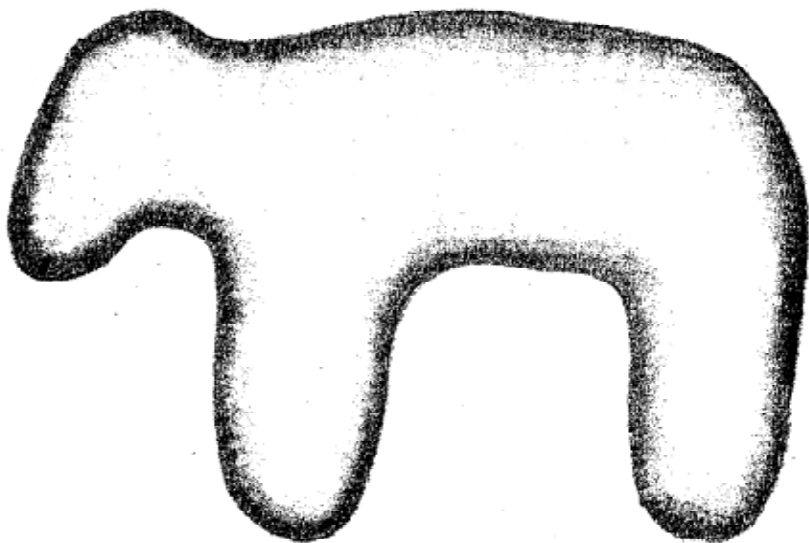
Was it important for an animal shaped mound to be near the water?

These are the types of questions archeologists have tried to answer. Their educated guesses are often arrived at by doing what you are doing... looking at basic facts and asking why.

Here are some of the observations made by archeologists:

This mound represents a “quadrapped” or four-legged animal that is facing downriver. Many of the other animal effigy mounds in this region are also facing downriver. Very few effigy mounds were used for burials and therefore probably had some other symbolic or ceremonial purpose. They may have been clan symbols, monuments or totems to animal spirits, or territorial markers. Occasionally an effigy mound was used as a burial place and people were usually buried in the heart, brain, or flank area. Perhaps people buried in an effigy mound were important civil or religious leaders the group wanted to honor.

The Little Bear mound was partially excavated and rehabilitated when a tree was removed from it several years ago. At that time no burials were found; however, a fire pit was located in the “heart” region.



## Stop # 8

As you look down this ridge towards Fire Point you will notice a long line of conical mounds. Many of the remaining mounds in northeast Iowa are on ridges and bluffs because these were not prime farm or town sites. Many river bottoms were once dominated by mounds as well, but they have been destroyed. About ten miles north of here is the town of Harpers Ferry. In the 1880s an archeologist tried to count all the mounds near the Mississippi River before the town was built. He estimated that there were over 900 mounds on what is today the town of Harpers Ferry, Iowa. Visitors to Harpers Ferry today may see one or two mounds, but all the rest have been destroyed by farming, roads, and other construction.

Do you think it is easy to count how many mounds are in a large mound group?

As you walk from here to Fire Point, count the number of conical mounds along the trail and compare your answers at the end.



## **Stop # 9**

Enjoy the view from Fire Point for a few minutes.

Sit and relax and again think about the prehistoric mound-builders. How many mounds did you count? (The correct answer is 19.)

Did you notice anything special about the size of the last few mounds?

Why do you think they were built taller than the other mounds?

The mound closest to you has been excavated and studied. It contained at least 8 burials that were extended, flexed, cremated, or bundles. The burials were made at different times which may partially account for the height. Various other items were also found in the mound including another copper breastplate, bird bones fashioned into sewing needles, copper beads, and pieces of pottery. Something else unique about this mound is that the top was covered with clay from the river valley. Why cover a mound with clay?

Now think about the river and its importance to the Woodland people. Why was this an excellent place to live?

The river provided water to drink and fish and clams to eat. It attracted deer and other animals that could be hunted. It was a transportation corridor that allowed them to visit other places and enhanced their trade networks

Other rivers served the same purposes. Look down river and notice the highest point of land on the right side. That is Pike's Peak State Park. Across the Mississippi River from Pike's Peak is the mouth of the Wisconsin River and more bluffs that are part of Wyalusing State Park. Prehistoric Indian mounds are also preserved at both of those parks as well as other places throughout southern Wisconsin and northeastern Iowa.

Are the ancient uses of these rivers any different from our uses today?

The Mississippi River is still a primary transportation corridor. Barges carrying trade items such as grain, lumber, and coal use the river on a daily basis while other boats carry travelers to distant locations. Fishing and clamming continue and freshwater pearls are still considered valuable. Across the river, the town of Prairie du Chien developed and grew because it was an excellent location for a town site with plentiful natural resources in the area.

Were prehistoric people really that different from us?

## **Stop # 10**

From this point you are looking across the Yellow River to the South Unit of Effigy Mounds National Monument. In the South Unit is the largest effigy mound group remaining in North America. Along the bluff are 10 bear mounds and 3 bird mounds clustered together. You may hike the four miles necessary to view those mounds.

During today's hike you have probably been exposed to some new ideas that contradict what you have already learned about Native Americans from movies and television. These prehistoric Woodland people did not live in tepees and hunt with bows and arrows. They did not ride horses nor did they cultivate corn. Their family groups were small and probably did not belong to a tribe with a chief as their leader.

We should avoid making generalizations about ALL Native Americans. While some groups have similar characteristics, we can also appreciate the uniqueness of each of their cultures. We preserve these prehistoric monuments not as curiosities, but out of respect for a people that once flourished in this land we now inhabit.





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